

South Island sojourn

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By Scott Thomas

Mention the words sight fishing, tiny dry flies, and wild brown trout. Throw in a cool flowing stream, maybe a snow capped mountain, and most fly fishos have already packed their bags and passport and are running for the nearest jet to New Zealand.

I did just that last week when I travelled NZ's South Island - the undisputed capital of brown trout fishing. Admittedly it was *just* a holiday, not a fishing holiday - my travelling companion and girlfriend, Dana, made that brutally clear.

Little did she know that beneath the tightly packed suitcase's trousers, shirts, socks and underwear, was an arsenal of fishing tackle. Four rods, four reels, several boxes of flies, a box of lures, and enough "accessories" to kill a pack horse.

It wasn't 'til the official holiday was over, the sightseeing complete, that the fishing began. After a week of travel we left Queenstown, and headed for Nelson by air, at the top end of the South Island. The climate was strikingly different. It was hot, sunny, the cicadas were singing and the wind was behaving.

In a little over an hour we'd reached Stonefly Lodge, overlooking the famous Motueka River. Actually I'd never heard of this river before and have a lot of trouble pronouncing Kiwi river names. All except the Hope River, aptly named because it gives some hope for speech impaired Aussie travellers.

But after a day fishing the Motueka, I'll certainly never forget it. The river has one of the highest populations of trout in New Zealand. All are browns and they average between 4 and 6lbs.

Top local guide, Steve, drove us to an access point downriver from the lodge. We were straight into fish. At first I was too slow to strike and missed a couple big browns which rose to my tiny dry fly, only minutes after hitting the water. The fish were holed up below overhanging willows. They were easy to spot. Regularly these big speckled trout would sip an insect from the surface as we stood only metres behind.

Another fish took the fly. This time my rhythm was downpat and the fly pinned the 4 ½ lb brown.

With a lot of great advice and local knowledge from guide, Steve, we landed plenty more big trout that day. The biggest would've been about 7 ½ lbs. Even Dana caught a nice 4lb fish after casting a fly for the very first time.



Stonefly lodge

Stonefly Lodge is a purpose-built luxury fly fishing lodge overlooking the Motueka River. Hosts John and Kate Kerr, formerly of Cape Don in the NT, spent three exhausting years building Stonefly Lodge from local timber and river stones. The result is a stunning lodge in a perfect setting. The lodge was a long-held dream of theirs after many years researching similar lodges and carefully choosing locations. Much of the reason for choosing this location, said John, is the very stable weather the area is famous for - a rarity for NZ.



The couple also know a thing or two about service. The food and hospitality was amazing, as was the selection of local wine, beer and spirits in the atmospheric bar area. There's even a pool table, well stocked bookshelf and fly tying area. The lodge has four rooms and ultimately suits couples and serious groups of trout fishos who really want that special fishing trip, both on, and off the water.

Stonefly Lodge is offering an end-of -season special for the month of April. I'm told April is a great month on the Motueka with less crowds and big fish. Contact John at info@stoneflylodge.co.nz and visit the website at www.stoneflylodge.co.nz.

